

The Future of French Language Education in Nigeria: Technological Innovations and Emerging Trends for Sustainable Educational Development

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Abstract

The increasing relevance of French as a foreign language in Nigeria, particularly in light of the country's geopolitical position among Francophone nations, has intensified the need for innovative and sustainable approaches to French language education. This article examines emerging trends and technological innovations shaping the teaching and learning of French within the Nigerian educational context. Drawing on contemporary scholarship and policy frameworks, the study explores the use of digital technologies such as mobile-assisted language learning, virtual classrooms, online collaboration tools, and artificial intelligence-supported instructional platforms in Nigerian French language classrooms. The article analyses how these technologies enhance learner engagement, communicative competence, and access to quality language education, while also addressing issues of inclusivity and sustainability. Furthermore, the study discusses pedagogical shifts towards learner-centred, competency-based, and blended learning models that align with Nigeria's educational reforms and sustainable development goals. Critical attention is given to contextual challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training in educational technology, inconsistent policy implementation, and the persistent digital divide between urban and rural schools. By situating French language education within Nigeria's broader developmental agenda, the article highlights the potential of technology-enhanced instruction to strengthen multilingual competence, regional integration, and global competitiveness. The study concludes with strategic recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders on

leveraging technological innovations to promote sustainable and effective French language education in Nigeria.

Keywords: French language education in Nigeria, educational technology, digital language pedagogy, sustainable educational development, multilingual education

Introduction

Nigeria's drive to enhance French as a foreign language (FFL) instruction is fundamentally tied to its contemporary geopolitical strategy and economic ambitions within West Africa. As the regional hegemon surrounded by Francophone nations, Nigeria's participation in cross-border trade, security cooperation, and socio-cultural exchange within frameworks like ECOWAS makes French proficiency a critical, pragmatic skill for national development and regional leadership (Ezekiel & Okonkwo, 2023). The revised National Policy on Education (2013, 2014) and its subsequent advocacies continue to underscore French as a compulsory subject to foster a bilingual citizenry, yet implementation has been inconsistent, failing to meet the demands of a 21st-century, digitally-connected Africa (Ayo-Oladapo, 2020, Omodara & Adu, 2022). This policy-practice gap is exacerbated by traditional pedagogical

models that prioritize rote memorization and grammatical accuracy over the communicative competence needed for real-world interaction in the Francosphere (Adewumi, 2021).

Concurrently, Nigeria is experiencing a digital youth boom, with one of the world's youngest populations and rapidly increasing internet and mobile phone penetration, even amidst infrastructural challenges (GSMA, 2024). This creates a dynamic tension: students are increasingly native to digital environments, while many French classrooms remain analogue, textbook-driven spaces. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a forced catalyst, abruptly exposing both the potential and the severe limitations of technology-mediated education in Nigeria, from innovative uses of social media for language practice to the stark realities of the digital divide (Chima & Nwosu, 2022). Therefore, re-contextualizing French language education through innovative and

sustainable technological integration is no longer merely an academic enhancement but a necessary evolution to achieve stated national goals of regional integration, global competitiveness, and equitable quality education as outlined in Nigeria's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). The government through the ministry of education should wake up and re-strategise on the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in schools. Experts in ICT should be employed to train both teachers and students on programmes that will enhance effective language learning (Ayo-Oladapo, Ahmed & Abu, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Despite its recognised importance, French language education in Nigeria faces significant hurdles: large class sizes, a shortage of qualified teachers, reliance on grammar-translation methods, and limited authentic linguistic exposure; lack of language laboratories, lack of ICT, lack of learning resources etc. These challenges are compounded by a rapidly evolving digital age, creating a gap between students' digital realities and classroom experiences. There is an urgent need to explore how technological

innovations can be harnessed to create more effective, engaging, and sustainable French language learning environments that are responsive to Nigeria's specific context.

Research Questions

- i. What technological trends are emerging in French language teaching in Nigeria?
- ii. How do technologies facilitate learner-centred and blended learning in French language classes?
- iii. What is the impact of technology on learner engagement, communicative competence, and access in French language learning?
- iv. What challenges hinder effective technology integration in French language teaching in Nigeria?
- v. How can technology be sustainably integrated into French language teaching in Nigeria?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

- i. examines the emerging technological trends being integrated into French language teaching in Nigeria,

- ii. analyse the pedagogical shifts towards learner-centred and blended models facilitated by these technologies.
- iii. evaluate the impact of these innovations on learner engagement, communicative competence, and access.
- iv. identify the contextual challenges impeding effective implementation.
- v. proposes strategic recommendations for sustainable integration.

Literature Review

Language education plays a vital role in the development of any country such as Nigeria (Ayo-Oladapo 2024) where education is considered an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. Roles of language in education cannot be over emphasized in any dynamic and progressive country like Nigeria (Ayo-Oladapo, 2021). In a multilingual country like Nigeria where lots of languages exist, different statuses are given to such languages. For instance, English language is categorized as the first official language in Nigeria while French is also given an exalted position of a second official language, Arabic is regarded as a foreign language while native languages are called indigenous languages (National Policy on Education, 2014). It is quite disheartening

that French language which is regarded as the second official language is facing a lot of challenges in its implementation thereby experiencing a setback due to lack of human and learning resources (Ayo-Oladapo 2020). ICT as part of learning resources is lacking in many schools. French language laboratories are not found in many schools where French is being taught. This is also leading to the negative attitudes of students at all levels of education ranging from primary to tertiary institutions towards the learning of the language (Ayo-Oladapo 2020). Contemporary language pedagogy has moved beyond conceptualizing technology as a mere tool, instead framing it as an integrated ecosystem that mediates learning experiences. Central to understanding effective integration is the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) framework, which underscores the necessity for teachers to develop a synergistic understanding of how technology transforms the teaching of specific content, such as French language structures and cultural knowledge (Mishra, 2019). This perspective aligns with sociocultural theory's emphasis on mediation, wherein digital tools—from collaborative platforms to

virtual worlds—function as new psychological artefacts that fundamentally reshape how learners interact with and internalize a new language (Lantolf & Poehner, 2020). Furthermore, connectivism learning theory, particularly relevant to the digital age, posits that learning resides within networks; thus, digital environments become essential for facilitating the connections, resource sharing, and authentic communication vital for modern language acquisition (AlDahdouh, 2018).

Globally, trends in Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) reveal a distinct shift towards personalized, immersive, and socially-connected experiences. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has evolved beyond simple applications to incorporate context-aware and gamified experiences that promote micro-learning and sustained engagement, especially for developing vocabulary and listening skills (Pegrum, 2019). Similarly, Virtual Exchange (VE) and telecollaboration have moved from peripheral projects to core curricular components, providing indispensable opportunities for intercultural communicative competence and authentic target language use with peers globally

(O'Dowd, 2021). Most disruptively, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and learning analytics are enabling unprecedented personalization through adaptive tutoring, immediate feedback on writing and speaking, and conversational practice with chatbots, thereby offering scalable support for differentiated instruction (Godwin-Jones, 2024).

Within the Nigerian context, however, the literature documents a landscape of technological adoption in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) that is growing yet significantly challenged. Recent studies confirm a positive correlation between the use of digital multimedia resources and improved student motivation and speaking performance, particularly in urban secondary schools, validating the potential of these tools (Ibrahim & Olaitan, 2023). Nonetheless, a critical body of research highlights persistent systemic barriers. Inadequate teacher digital literacy, often originating from pre-service training programs that lack robust TPACK components, severely constrains effective integration (Bello & Ajayi, 2022). Moreover, the digital divide is critically framed not solely as an issue of hardware access, but also as a "participation divide." This means

students in underserved areas frequently lack the guided, curated opportunities to use technology for meaningful language creation—moving beyond passive consumption—which in turn perpetuates educational inequity (Adewale & Sotonode, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive and contextual analysis of technological innovations in French language instruction in Nigeria. The investigation unfolds in three sequential phases.

The first phase involved a broad quantitative survey targeting French teachers in secondary schools across multiple geopolitical zones. A stratified random sample of 150 respondents was used to ensure representation from urban (50), semi-urban (50), and rural schools (50). Participants complete a structured questionnaire designed to map the landscape of technology access, frequency of use, perceived impacts on learning, and the major challenges encountered. The resulting data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify general

patterns and significant variations across different school contexts.

To add depth and nuance to the survey findings, the second phase adopts a qualitative multiple-case study approach. Four schools identified as actively integrating technology will be purposively selected. Within these sites, data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with teachers, focus group discussions with students, and direct classroom observations. This multi-source qualitative data was thematically analysed to develop a rich, grounded understanding of how technology is pedagogically enacted, how it shapes the learner experience, and the intricate systemic barriers that mediate its use.

The third phase involved a document analysis of key national and state-level policy frameworks, including the National Policy on Education and the French language curriculum. This analysis critically examined the alignment between official policy directives and the empirical realities uncovered in the earlier phases, highlighting the strategic gaps that need to be addressed.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that the landscape of French as a Foreign Language

(FFL) education in Nigeria is undergoing a significant transformation, catalyzed by the integration of digital technologies. This shift is manifested in several practical applications. Foremost is the proliferation of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL), which leverages Nigeria's high mobile penetration rates (Pew Research Center, 2018). Smartphones and applications such as Duolingo, Busuu, and language-specific podcasts are increasingly utilized for vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, and micro-learning tasks, facilitating learning beyond formal classroom confines (Adeyemi & Oluwatoyin, 2021). Furthermore, the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated the widespread adoption of Virtual Classrooms and Learning Management System (LMS) platforms. Tools like Google Classroom, Moodle, and Zoom have become integral for facilitating instruction, submitting assignments, and even hosting virtual guest speakers from Francophone countries, thereby enriching cultural exposure (Olagbaju & Gbadamosi, 2022).

Concurrently, Online Collaboration and Social Media tools have fostered new communities of practice. WhatsApp groups

provide platforms for peer support, while Facebook communities facilitate resource sharing among educators and learners. Asynchronous tools like Padlet and Flipgrid are employed to encourage video-based speaking practice, mitigating the anxiety often associated with live performance (Akinwamide & Adedimeji, 2023). While still in nascent stages, there is a growing exploration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced language learning software. These AI-powered platforms offer potential for interactive dialogues, automated writing feedback, and personalised learning pathways, pointing toward a future of increasingly adaptive language instruction (Eze, 2023).

These technological tools act not merely as supplements but as catalysts for essential pedagogical reforms. A primary shift is the movement from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches. Technology enables differentiated instruction and empowers students to undertake creative, student-led projects, such as creating digital videos or podcasts in French, thereby fostering autonomy and engagement (Kessler, 2018). Furthermore, technology supports the implementation of Competency-Based

Learning. Digital portfolios and e-assessment tools allow educators to track and measure specific communicative competencies systematically, aligning more closely with frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Little, 2020).

This evolution has given rise to the Blended Learning Model as a particularly sustainable framework for the Nigerian context. This hybrid model optimizes limited face-to-face classroom time for high-interactivity speaking practice, while extending learning through structured online activities beyond school walls (Graham, 2019). Critically, these technological integrations hold promise for Promoting Inclusivity and Sustainability. By providing access to quality digital resources for learners in remote areas and utilizing assistive technologies for those with disabilities, technology can support the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2017).

Notwithstanding this potential, the integration of technology is fraught with significant systemic obstacles. Pervasive Infrastructural Deficits, including unreliable

electricity, poor internet bandwidth, and a dearth of hardware such as computers and projectors—particularly in rural public schools—form a primary barrier to implementation (Adedaja, 2022). This is compounded by issues of Digital Literacy and Teacher Training. Many FFL teachers lack the requisite Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) to integrate digital tools effectively, and existing professional development programmes are often inadequate and sporadic (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Olatoye & Ogunkunle, 2024). These challenges coalesce into a stark Digital Divide, creating a worrying disparity in access and digital skills between urban private institutions and rural public schools, thereby risking the exacerbation of existing educational inequalities (Adegoke, 2021). Finally, a Policy-Practice Disconnect frequently undermines innovation, characterized by inconsistent funding, a lack of sustained technical support, and rigid, examination-focused curricula that do not reward technological or communicative experimentation (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Conclusion

While emerging technologies hold immense potential to revitalize FFL education in Nigeria and align proficiency with national interests in regional diplomacy, security, and trade, their success is contingent upon addressing the aforementioned systemic challenges (Babaita, 2022). Effective integration must be context-sensitive, moving beyond the mere introduction of gadgets to foster genuine pedagogical transformation. Sustainable models will require multifaceted strategies, including the establishment of robust public-private partnerships to address infrastructural gaps; continuous, TPACK-centered teacher training programmes; and curriculum and assessment reforms that formally value communicative digital literacy (Ukwuoma, 2023). Ultimately, the creation and curation of localized digital content relevant to the Nigerian socio-cultural context will be crucial for ensuring that technological integration is both meaningful and enduring for the Nigerian Francophone learner.

This study substantiates that technological innovations when underpinned by sound pedagogical principles and thoughtfully adapted to local contexts, possess substantial potential to elevate the quality, expand the

reach, and improve the sustainability of French language education in Nigeria. These tools provide viable pathways for cultivating the multilingual competencies essential to Nigeria's aspirations for regional leadership and effective global engagement. Nevertheless, the full realization of this potential is contingent upon a concerted and systemic approach that addresses existing infrastructural, pedagogical, and strategic gaps.

Recommendations

To translate this potential into tangible outcomes, a multi-stakeholder strategy is imperative. The following recommendations are proposed:

For policymakers, including the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and relevant federal and state ministries, it is recommended that a clear national framework for the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language education be developed and adequately funded. This framework should be supported by dedicated budgetary allocations to ensure not only the initial procurement of digital infrastructure but also its long-term maintenance and upgrading. Furthermore, policymakers

should mandate and subsidize continuous, practical training for French language teachers, focusing on the development of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) to ensure effective classroom integration.

For educators and educational institutions, a pragmatic adoption of phased, blended learning models is advised, with designs tailored to the specific resource realities of each setting. Additionally, institutions should actively foster professional communities of practice to facilitate the collaborative sharing of digitally-enabled resources, lesson plans, and evidence-based pedagogical strategies among French teachers nationwide.

For external stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations and technology companies, strategic investment is crucial. Priorities should include the development and dissemination of offline-first or low-bandwidth educational applications and content specifically designed for French language acquisition. Moreover, stakeholders are encouraged to support and fund virtual exchange programmes that create authentic linguistic and cultural immersion opportunities by connecting

Nigerian classrooms with their counterparts in Francophone Africa.

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Received: Jan 06, 2026

Accepted: Mar 02, 2026

Published: Apr 17, 2026

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